

REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN REYNOLDS 20th MARCH

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HOSTS A14 CONFERENCE

A conference of some of the most influential organisations in the County has met in Cambridgeshire to discuss improving the A14. Cambridgeshire County Council called the meeting which included representatives from small and big business, local councils and freight organisations. The meeting discussed the congestion hit stretch of the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon as well as the broader issues affecting the whole of the route.

Cambridgeshire County Councillor Ian Bates, Cabinet Member for Growth and Planning, said: "There was much agreement around the room that this is a big problem that requires big solutions. It was agreed that improvements to the A14 are vital for the local and national economies. The main point to come from the session was that there is a general agreement that major improvements to the road are needed. But also improvements for freight to be carried by rail and enhanced public transport should form part of a package."

"It is not just a Cambridgeshire problem or even national but European as well. The short term improvements offered by the Government are very welcome but long term solutions needed also to be delivered as soon as possible. That is why it was agreed there should be a four leg approach to funding. This should be local, national Government and European funding if possible as well as from private sources. The route is an important trade route from Felixstowe and as such we join with Northamptonshire in approaching the European Union for funding."

"There was also agreement that tolling was likely to be necessary and that shadow tolling would not be appropriate. Tolling would not pay for the whole of the scheme but off-set some of the cost. There was also support for a unified approach along the whole route with our neighbours in Suffolk and Northamptonshire. We have been working very closely with the Department for Transport and very pleased the Government have made commitments for the short and long term improvements. We will continue to work with Government to make sure this is delivered. A clogged A14 remains a block to business and hampers the growth of Cambridgeshire's and the national economy."

SMART CARDS GET LONGER LIFE

Busway smartcards are being upgraded and given a longer life as part of updates to the ticketing system. Following discussions with bus operators and in response to feedback from the public. Smartcards can be topped up with an additional 10 trips on the bus. All existing cardholders will receive new Smartcards to replace the existing ones. The County Council will send a new card, which supports the new two month time limit, to existing smartcard holders. This means they can benefit from the change and will also gain an additional two free trips recognising the slight inconvenience to customers of switching from the old cards to the new cards.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "As a trial bus operators asked that Smartcards had just a month expiry date for the 10 journey carnet. Now the usway has been so successful they have agreed to extend that to two months. I am pleased that customers will enjoy a couple of free trips on the Busway because of this improvement to the system and need to issue the new cards. The Busway has seen massive success with more than a million journeys since it opened and we are constantly looking, with operators and the communities it serves, at ways of improving it."

COMMUNITY AND SUBSIDISED TRANSPORT SET TO BE TRANSFORMED

Council transport chiefs have discussed the proposed timescale for reducing non-commercial bus subsidies and replacing them with more targeted local services.

Cambridgeshire County Council Cabinet is to consult with local communities on replacement services before existing subsidies are taken away. Some 80 per cent of bus services across Cambridgeshire are commercial services with the rest being subsidised by the County Council.

For example Service 19 which serves the villages around Linton costs the tax payer £107,000 a year, equating to £12.09 per passenger trip.

The Council agreed on February 21 to invest £1.5 million in Cambridgeshire Future Transport schemes and to phase out the £2.7 million of existing subsidies. Cabinet have agreed that consultation should start six months before an existing subsidy is removed on finding alternative and more targeted transport solutions to meet local needs. These services could not just be used for traditional bus journeys but provide vehicles during the rest of the week for community groups. Subsidised services have been grouped into 13 geographical areas which have transport links within them.

This is so all services can be looked at as a whole and alternatives explored as well as looking at ways of joining into existing networks. This means community transport could link into commercial services and potentially help make some subsidised services commercial. The areas with the most expensive services are being looked at first as well as those which have the most potential or practical alternatives that can be quickly developed.

Cambridgeshire County Councillor Steve Criswell, Cabinet Member for Community Infrastructure, said: "We recognise how valuable subsidised services have been which is why we have invested in them in the past. However, we believe there are better and more cost effective ways of delivering local transport that can link to commercial or other services while providing wider benefits for the community. For example there must be a better way than paying £107,000 for a bus service or over £12 for just one person to take a trip on a bus.

The suggestion to review services in areas rather than individually means we can take a holistic approach to providing new links and solutions that will benefit our communities. We will consult with communities six months before existing subsidies are reduced to fully understand the local needs in an area and work with communities to identify what services could be put in place. This will not only produce transport that is value for money but actually go where the community wants it to go. It could mean community groups have access to vehicles they never had before and boost local enterprise."

TRANSPORT SCHEME NEEDS MORE DRIVERS

Cambridgeshire County Council's Social and Education Transport Team is looking for more willing drivers to help make a real difference to the lives of many people in the county - and they could receive up to £4,500 a year tax free.

The County Council provides a transport service to eligible people who need to attend one of the care centres, day service facilities or education establishments. Community Drivers play a vital role transporting a host of people who would otherwise miss out

Drivers are needed in all areas of Cambridgeshire. Volunteers receive 45p a mile for journeys they undertake as part of the scheme and can earn up to £4,500 annually before the payment becomes liable to tax. Being unemployed and signing on is not a barrier.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said: "It's the ideal opportunity for people with some spare time and who like meeting a variety of people. Our community drivers make a real difference to the people they transport and it's a worthwhile and rewarding contribution to society." The County Council is looking to boost the team across the whole of Cambridgeshire, so interest from all areas of the county would be welcomed. Community drivers receive a payment of 45p a mile. Community drivers must be over 21 with two years driving experience; have their own roadworthy car that has fully comprehensive insurance; and will undergo an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check paid for by the County Council.

For more information contact 0345 045 5208 or go to Cambridgeshire.gov.uk/communitydrivers

WORKING UP PLANS TO IMPROVE THE ELY CROSSING

Work investigating the various options to tackle congestion and remove the conflicts between road and rail in Ely is gathering pace, ahead of a final decision to be made this summer. Since a public consultation revealed 81 per cent of the public supported Route B, ten per cent backed route D and four per cent preferred an enhanced underpass to resolve the problems of road and rail traffic in the South of Ely, officers at Cambridgeshire County Council and East Cambridgeshire District Council have focussed on a number of tasks, including:

- * Environmental assessments of impact on the conservation area and cathedral setting of each of the options presented to the public
- * Ground investigation work on the land which could be used for routes B and D
- * Meetings with Network Rail engineers to discuss the possible impact of lowering the existing road under the current railway bridge
- * Desktop archaeology looking at the land across the south of Ely
- * Updating monitoring statistics to take into account changes in traffic use and flows
- * Meetings with English Heritage to carry out a wider evaluation of all the options
- * The installation of a mobile air quality monitor to study the air quality in the South of Ely to help investigate the impact of recent changes within the city and the effect which the various options would have on pollution

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "Since the public consultation, officers have been hard at work investigating all options. This work has involved, for example, drilling to test the land on route B, talking to Network Rail about the impact of an underpass and investigating the effect of traffic on air quality in the south of the city.

"No one should underestimate our resolve to tackle the problems caused by the current level crossing situation once and for all. If we get it right, we can help to enhance the city of Ely in a way that will benefit residents, businesses and visitors, and simultaneously help the railway to play its full role as a critical freight and passenger line of national significance.

This type of information is crucial for us to come to a conclusion about which option will deliver the best overall outcome. The work we are doing now is to ensure no stone is left unturned before the final decision by the Cabinet at the County Council in the summer."

CAMBRIDGESHIRE SET TO WELCOMBE PARALYMPIC FLAME

To mark six months to go before the start of the Paralympic Games, The London 2012 Organising Committee (LOCOG) has announced the areas across the UK which will hold Flame Celebrations as part of the Paralympic Torch Relay.

A number of sites throughout Cambridgeshire are to receive parts of the flame in a new concept for the Paralympic Torch Relay, where Four Flames will be lit in London, Greater Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff and then shared throughout the nation.

These events over the August Bank Holiday weekend will include:

- * Cambridge - the flame will be received in the closing ceremony of the 'Paralympic sports fortnight' in the city
- * South Cambridgeshire - there will be a special lakeside event in Milton Country Park where music and activities will entertain local people as the flame arrives.
- * East Cambridgeshire - the flame is to be received at a ceremony on Ely riverside, followed by a spectacular evening event on the Palace Green in Ely
- * Fenland - there is a special event planned at the Hudson Leisure Centre, Wisbech involving the Fenland Disability Sports Forum (Fendis).
- * Huntingdonshire - the flame will arrive for an event at the Grafham Water Centre and be welcomed by the Burns Children Club
- * Peterborough - there will be a showcase event involving a handcycle parade and the opening of the Peterborough Disability Games.

The four Flames will then be united at the Paralympic Flame Lighting Ceremony at Stoke Mandeville, the spiritual home of the Paralympic Movement to create the London 2012 Paralympic Flame. This Flame will be carried on a 24 hour overnight Relay to London and the Opening Ceremony of the Paralympic Games.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "It is fantastic news to hear parts of the Paralympic flame are coming to our county. The Paralympic Games was actually founded in the UK in 1948, when Dr Ludwig Guttman organised a competition at Stoke Mandeville hospital for World War II soldiers with spinal cord injuries. Cambridgeshire has a long and celebrated history with the Olympic and Paralympic movement so I am sure the events which are being planned and the excitement which is building around the Games will touch the lives of many in the months to come."

A total of 34 communities around the country have taken the opportunity to host Flame Celebrations and be part of the programme of events that will take place over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

On Tuesday 28 August, the Paralympic Flame will be carried Torchbearers, running in teams of five, in a 24 hour overnight relay from Stoke Mandeville to the Olympic Stadium for the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games. The 620 inspirational Torchbearers, who will also carry the Flame during local community visits, are being chosen by the three Presenting Partners, BT, Lloyds TSB and Sainsbury's. There were over 3500 nominations from across the country and they are now going through judging before the successful teams are announced in May. The relay will also include nominations from the British Paralympic Association and the International Paralympic Committee.

People will also be encouraged to help light the way to the Paralympic Games by lighting a lantern. For more information visit

www.london2012.com/get-involved/local-leaders/lantern-festival/

To find a Flame Festival or Flame Celebration near you, and to see a fly through of the London 2012 Torch Relay programme, please visit www.london2012.com/paralympic-torch-relay

INDEPENDENT REPORT ON MEMBERS ALLOWANCES RELEASED

An independent panel tasked with reviewing member's allowances has made its report public. Cambridgeshire County Council, like all authorities, has a duty to have allowances for councillors reviewed regularly. Members of the panel looked at the current allowances as well as various evidence from a range of sources, including members and a public consultation.

The panel, chaired by David Sales, has made a number of recommendations which will keep allowances spend the same as this year.

The report recommends that:

- * The basic members' allowance should remain at the current level of £7610
- * The current two tier structure of allowances for cabinet Portfolio Holders be replaced by a single tier of £11,697 (the average of the current two tiers), with no impact on overall costs.
- * The allowances payable to the major opposition spokesmen be consolidated into five spokesmen and that each should receive an allowance of £6,380, with no impact on overall costs.
- * A 'one special responsibility allowance' rule be introduced.
- * The allowance paid for carers is amended so that it covers the actual costs associated with care
- * Travel expenses can be claimed for attendance at parish council meetings
- * All allowances be indexed to the annual percentage 'cost of living' award for local government staff at spinal column 49. The award for 2012-13 is 0%.

The report also indicated some areas the panel wish to address in next year's review relating to the workload of portfolio holders, the effects of localism, the work of the fostering/adoption panels and to further simplify the scheme.

Copies of the panel's report are available to download from the Council's web site at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk

CHEER THE FLAME AS IT COMES TO CAMBRIDGESHIRE

From the historic streets and stunning river setting of Cambridge to the roads of St Ives and Huntingdon, the Olympic Flame is set to be seen by thousands of Cambridgeshire residents this July.

The exact route of the Olympic Torch Relay has been unveiled, giving communities, families and individuals the chance to choose their perfect spot to watch the Olympic Flame go past. So whether it is in Peterborough on Tuesday 3 July or going down Newmarket Road, Mill Road and Parkers Piece in Cambridge on Saturday 7 July to the River Cam and Huntingdon Road in Cambridge and the town centres of St Ives and Huntingdon on Sunday 8 July, there will be many opportunities for residents to share in the excitement the Olympic Torch Relay.

All the streets along the London 2012 Olympic Torch Relay can be viewed in full at www.london2012.com/olympictorchrelay which gives street-by-street details and proposed start times for when the Olympic Flame will begin its journey each day.

Councillor Martin Curtis, who leads on the Olympics at Cambridgeshire County Council, said: "Now we know the exact streets and river which the Olympic Flame is going to go along, London 2012 is now beginning to feel very real. With the Torch coming through Cambridge, St Ives, Huntingdon and Peterborough, thousands of people will be able to see not just the Olympic flame but also Torchbearers who have been nominated by their communities. These will be ordinary people getting the chance to do something extraordinary. So I hope that come our weekend in July, we line the streets and show how important the Games are to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough."

The exact route of the Torchbearers in Cambridgeshire is as follows:

* Saturday 7 July: the Olympic Flame will enter the city via Newmarket Road, Barnwell Road, Brooks Road, and Mill Road before stopping at the Evening event at Parkers Piece.

* Sunday 8 July: the Torch will begin its journey from Trinity College early in the morning, along the River Cam via punt then along Castle Street and Huntingdon Road before it joins the Olympic Torch Convoy. It will then stop in St Ives where it will run through the town via Cromwell Place, Market Road, Market Hill/The Pavement, Crown Street/Merryland, The Broadway, The Waits, Ramsey Road and onto Houghton Road (A1123). The Torch will then travel to Huntingdon and journey through the town via Main St, Desborough Road, Mayfield Road, Hartford Road, Riverside Road, High Street, George Street then finally onto Brampton Road.

Over the next few weeks, local authorities and the police will be working with communities and businesses who are on the route to explain the impact of rolling road blocks and any temporary road closures.

An average of 115 Torchbearers a day will carry the Olympic Flame during its 8,000 mile journey around the UK before it arrives at the Olympic Stadium on 27 July 2012 for the lighting of the cauldron at the Opening Ceremony, signifying the official start of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

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TOP MARKS FOR COUNTY COUNCIL RESPITE SERVICE

A respite service for adults with learning disabilities has been given top marks in every category after a visit by Government inspectors. St Luke's Close in Huntingdon, recently underwent a routine inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and was found to be performing well in all aspects of the inspection. The centre provides respite services for adults with learning disabilities, supporting six people at any one time for overnight stays and day care. In total St Luke's Close provides services to 54 people.

CQC inspectors spoke to service users, families and carers. They reported that people were positive about the care and support provided and the variety of activities available. Relatives interviewed were complimentary about the service and found it to be invaluable and met their relative's needs very well. The service was described as 'a real lifeline' by relatives who also stated 'they would be lost without St Luke's Close.'

Local Cambridgeshire County Council John Reynolds, said: "The outcome of the CQC inspection is an excellent achievement by everyone involved with St Luke's Close and a reflection of the hard work, empathy and dedication that the staff team put into supporting those people who really need it."

CQC looked at all aspects of the work of the centre, including measures to ensure users were kept safe and supported in a way which reflected their individual needs and they were protected from abuse with respect for their human rights. The quality and accessibility of the building; staff training, supervision and management practice and processes were also checked.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE WELCOMES £60 MILLION BOOST FOR RURAL BUSINESSES

Rural businesses urged to investigate new Government fund to see if it could help their company. Cambridgeshire councillors are urging rural businesses to see if they could benefit from a new £60 million grant scheme announced by the Government. The Rural Economy Grant scheme asks rural businesses to apply for individual grants which could range from £25,000 to more than £1m each. The objective is to support the businesses in increasing competitiveness and profits.

Cambridgeshire County Council wants to help business boom locally and drive forward the economy, help create jobs and raise the standard of living for communities. The Government says successful applicants will receive up to 40% of the cost of projects and the five areas they anticipate the scheme supporting will be in farm competitiveness; agric-food; tourism; forestry and micro enterprises such as digital media technology and small scale, high value manufacturing.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "The County Council wants to make sure businesses and especially those in our rural areas hear about every opportunity they can to help grow their company. A successful local economy means more jobs for our communities and a better standard of living. It has been shown that Cambridgeshire can help kick start the national economy. This grant from the Government might not be suitable for every business but we hope people will look to see if it can help them."

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